**What Is the Difference Between Realism & Naturalism in Theatre?**

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Theatrical naturalism and realism differ in key ways.

Although similar, realism and naturalism in theater are two different artistic movements. Naturalism is a form of realism that focuses on how technology and science affect society as a whole as well as how society and genetics then affect individuals. Realism, on the other hand, describes any play that depicts ordinary people in everyday situations.

**Realism**

Starting in the early 19th century, realism was an art movement that shifted from the unrealistic fairy-tale or fantastic situations and characters theater-goers normally found in romantic plays. The Theater Dictionary indicates that many people consider Henrik Ibsen the father of the modern realism for the three-dimensional characters he created and the situations in which he put them. People in the audience could relate to the activities occurring on stage and the individuals involved.

**Naturalism**

Charles Darwin's book "The Origin of Species" influenced the theatrical world through the naturalistic genre. Darwin theorized that the fittest of a species would survive and pass on its genetic material, which dramatists translated into a dramatic genre that focused on how genetics and social advancement affect individuals. The naturalistic focus in art and literature is to address subjects in a scientific manner, with the artist serving as a disinterested party who observes and studies it. Authors who attempted this daunting task include Emile Zola.

**Similarities**

Dramatists intend that naturalistic and realistic plays should depict events that could happen in real life, maybe even to members of the audience. Both genres focus on individuals and families, and generally relate to everyday situations. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, playwrights found ample subject matter for these genres as the sciences advanced and people struggled and fought against oppressive governing systems. These changes in society were frequently the subject of both naturalistic and realistic plays.

**Differences**

Naturalism approaches art in a more scientific, almost clinical, manner than realism. Both genres may have dealt with the emotional and family struggles of the characters; realistic plays often had characters to whom the audience could relate and sympathize. Naturalistic plays, which were difficult to create and rarely popular, approached every element with the detachment of a scientist, according to educators at Northern Virginia Community College. Realistic plays could show characters breaking free from difficult situations and allow the audience to empathize with their plight; Naturalistic works, on the other hand, sought only to study the situation, characters and other factors without interpretation.